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Developing Countries Farm Radio Network

Preparing for the United Nations Year of Desertification

With the Year of Desertification approaching in 2006, the Farm Radio Network is devoting the next few radio script packages to the theme of preventing desertification.

DESERTIFICATION refers to the degradation of drylands. This involves a loss of biological diversity and economic productivity in croplands, pastures and woodlands. It is caused mainly by climate variability and unsustainable human activities, especially overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and poor irrigation practices.

Desertification has huge impacts across the globe, and is most devastating in Africa. By undermining the capacity of the land to produce, it contributes to poverty. More than a quarter of a billion people are directly affected, while the livelihoods of more than one billion people, many of them among the world's poorest, are threatened. Fully one-third of the earth's land surface is

at risk from desertification. If desertification is not stopped and reversed, crop yields in many affected areas will decline. Malnutrition, starvation, and ultimately famine may result.

The Farmers' Role

The actions of small-scale farmers are clearly central to solving the problem of desertification. As those most directly involved with managing the land, farmers have valuable experience and a special understanding of their local environment. Knowing that drylands are easily damaged, farmers over time have devised strategies that protect the land, such as shifting agriculture and nomadic herding. In recent decades however, changing conditions have made some traditional strategies impractical, and farmers have struggled to respond to new situations. Some have adapted well; there are many success stories. Building on existing knowledge, farmers sometimes collaborate with governments, technical specialists, non-governmental organizations and other farmers to creatively solve problems. For example, Local Level Monitoring is a tool developed in Namibia to improve land management. It's based on monitoring indicators that farmers themselves have

identified such as livestock conditions, rainfall, rangeland conditions, carrying capacity and bush density.

Broadcasters have a Key Role to Play in Supporting Farmers

Broadcasters can:

- Disseminate information on useful and harmful farming practices;
- Spread the news about the negative social and ecological impacts of desertification;
- Sow hope and encouragement by publicizing success stories;
- Help empower farmers by validating the fact that traditional knowledge and stewardship play a vital role in fighting desertification;
- Provide a forum for information exchange on practical methods for protecting the land;
- Engage individuals, communities, organizations and governments in a dialogue about how to manage natural resources;
- Provide information that demystifies new technologies and programs;
- Present government as a co-stakeholder, interested in collaborating with communities and individuals;
- Connect farmers with other farmers, non-profit organizations, funders, and other support;

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- Let farmers know that desertification is a worldwide problem and they are not alone in the struggle;
- Empower farmers by giving them a chance to speak and to share their own ideas.

The scripts in our desertification series will present a range of techniques, approaches and ideas about dryland agriculture, drought and how farmers can slow or prevent land degradation. 



DCFRN's

Program Committee

DCFRN is a small organization with a large mandate. In order to be innovative and effective, DCFRN, as part of its organizational structure, draws on a Program Committee of dedicated volunteers. The Committee works together to ensure that the Network's programs strengthen African broadcasters' capacity to assist small-scale farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. The Program Committee consists of members of the Board of Directors and individuals with expertise in fields related to DCFRN's mission. Committee members meet several times a year to review DCFRN's program activities and to:

- Ensure that procedures are developed and implemented to monitor the Network's programs, evaluate their impact, and ensure that they further the mission of DCFRN; and
- Provide appropriate direction, consultation and guidance in the development of new projects and program activities.

We would like to welcome Gilbert Héroux and Charles Marful to the Program Committee. Charles and Gilbert were elected to the DCFRN Board of Directors on November 5th 2005 and immediately indicated their interest to become members of the Program Committee.

Charles Marful, Director of Human Resources for Ernst & Young's Tax Practice, is originally from Ghana and has worked in several African countries. Charles is a strong believer that food production is essential to the survival and growth of all people. He is convinced that DCFRN's work will strengthen capacity and institution building in sub-Saharan Africa, two key preconditions for sustainable growth in any country or region.

Gilbert Héroux is currently the Director General of Vanier College, a 5,700 student



Back Row (left to right): Doug Ward, Charles Marful, Gilbert Héroux, Vijay Cuddeford

Front Row (left to right): Janette McDonald, Blythe McKay, George Atkins, Diane Huffman, Helen Hambly Odame

Anglophone Cégep located in Montreal. Gilbert has had extensive experience in rural development, first in Canada's northern regions and more recently in sub-Saharan Africa. He is currently involved with projects based in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Over the past few years, his work in international development has allowed him the opportunity to travel to Mauritania, Senegal and Morocco.

We would also like to welcome Vijay Cuddeford to the Program Committee. Currently, Vijay is acting as interim managing editor for DCFRN. He is a writer, editor, and researcher who has contributed to DCFRN's script packages for the past eight years. Vijay consults to national and international NGOs on the environmental impact of agriculture, chemical policy, and food security. Vijay lives in North Vancouver, B.C. with his wife and daughter.

The other members of the Program Committee are Helen Hambly Odame (Committee chairperson), Janette McDonald, Doug Ward and DCFRN's founder, George Atkins. Staff members of the program committee include Diane Huffman, Executive Director, and Blythe McKay, Development Communication Coordinator. 

Supporting broadcasters in developing countries to strengthen small-scale farming and rural communities.

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